

Advanced Philosophy Midterm Guide
Jan. 2011

Marx, Fanon, Ghandi, Malcolm X, Trotsky & Breton, Benjamin, Bin Laden

Trotsky & Breton

- How do Trotsky and Breton define “true art”?
- What makes the artist “the natural ally of revolution” according to Trotsky and Breton?
- In light of the censorship of art and the persecution of artists in Nazi Germany and the USSR, Breton and Trotsky argue for “*complete freedom for art*”. At the same time, they “recognize [...] that the revolutionary State has the right to defend itself against the counterattack of the bourgeoisie.” They address this potential contradiction by arguing that, “there is an abyss between these enforced and temporary measures of revolutionary self-defense and the pretension to lay commands on intellectual creation.” How tenable is this argument?

Malcolm X

- In his speech, *The Ballot or the Bullet*, Malcolm X argues, “You and I in America are not faced with a segregationist conspiracy”. What sort of conspiracy does he believe black Americans are subject to? What proof does he provide?
- Explain Malcolm X’s distinction between human and civil rights. Why does he believe that it is crucial to abandon the rhetoric of civil rights in favor of human rights?
- How is *The Ballot or the Bullet* a profoundly American speech despite its uncompromising critique of America?

Marx

- How have European governments conspired against the proletariat? What specific laws does Marx cite?
- How has capitalism exploited children?
- Explain capitalist use of violence against the masses.
- What is primitive accumulation? What does Marx have to say about it?

Gandhi

- How does Gandhi define “true civilization”?
- Why does Gandhi believe that India has not become more technologically advanced?
- Explain Gandhi’s concept of *swaraj*.
- Explain Gandhi’s argument against brute force in the struggle for Indian independence?

Benjamin

- What, according to Benjamin, is the relationship between violence and the law?

Bin Laden

- What historical events does bin Laden cite in justifying his call for jihad against the “Jewish-Christian” alliance?
- Cite two ways in which the Saudi leadership has “desecrated its legitimacy”?

Fanon

- What makes violence necessary in the colonialist struggle?

Gregory

- How do geographical knowledges function to close off public debate?
- Explain the idea that "publics do not pre-exist discourse but are formed through it".
- What are "imaginative geographies"?
- According to Gregory, what are the three imaginative geographies employed by the perpetrators of the war on terror, and what are the corresponding "counter-geographies" that Gregory advocates for?

"A Global Sense of Place" by Doreen Massey

- What is time-space compression? How and why do different people experience it differently?
- How can one have a sense of place even in the face of relentless time-space compression?

"A Clash of Civilizations?" by Samuel P. Huntington

- What is Huntington's concept of "civilization"? What are his six civilizations?
- According to Huntington, why will future conflicts occur along the so-called "fault lines" between civilizations?
- What are some potential flaws in Huntington's concept of competing civilizations, and the conflicts that supposedly arise because of this competition?

Pape and Feldman

- What is unique about the element of suicide in terrorism? What are the consequences of this?
- What is the unifying factor in the over 90% of suicide bombings? How does this call into question Huntington's theory of the clash of civilizations.

"National Liberation and Culture" by Amilcar Cabral

- Why is culture inseparable from economics and politics?
- What is the "dilemma of cultural resistance"? How can it be escaped?
- How do colonial forces negate historical processes through violent usurpation of the means of production? (answer in Hegelian and Marxist context?)
- How is a society's "level of productive forces" a cultural indicator?
- How is armed struggle not only a product but a determinant of culture? (answer in Fanonian context?)

"Living on a Lifeboat" by Garret Hardin

- Define the "tragedy of the commons". How does Hardin apply this concept to policies of international aid?
- According to Hardin, how does hunger relief provided by the "first world" to the "third world" create a so-called "ratchet effect"?
- Hardin presents a neo-Malthusian view of population growth. Why might this model be insufficient in today's world, knowing what we know now? In this light, do Hardin's arguments in opposition to international aid hold water? Why or why not?

Borges

- Explain Borges's distinction between remembering and thinking? How does he define thinking?
- What does Funes's predicament reveal about all systems of knowledge?

Rorty

- Define nominalism. Explain the central thesis of nominalism (“we should replace the notion of intrinsic nature with that of identifying description”).
- Define correspondence theory.
- What does the notion of “increasing our understanding” mean to Rorty? Why does Rorty favor the metaphor of breadth over depth in this context?
- What is the basis for the argument that science is the “queen” of the disciplines? In other words, how would a 19th century positivist or a 20th century analytic philosopher ground the argument that science alone can provide truth?
- Why, according to Rorty (and Gadamer) is the techie/fuzzy dichotomy false?
- Explain the difference between continental and analytic philosophy.